1 Interview Summaries

1.1 Focus Group for Utilities: Gas, Electric, TeleCommunications

Interview Type	Focus Group, Utilities: Gas, Electric and TeleCommunications
Interview Location	Burton Cross State Office Building, Augusta, Maine
Interview Date	October 29, 2001
Summary Date	November 26, 2001
Interviewer	Thomas Burns agismap1@maine.rr.com
Interviewed:	

- Carl S. Dougherty, Senior Engineer, Portland Pipe Line Corporation carldougherty@pmpl.com
- Michael L. Edgecomb, Governement Relations Manager, Adelphia medgecomb@fvp.com
- Felicia D. O'Clair, CAD/GIS Coordinator, Maine Public Service Company foclair@mainepublicservice.com
- Daniel T. Lee, Manager of Engineering, Maine Public Service Company dlee@mainepublicservice.com
- Chris Wilber, Right of Way Manager, Portland Natural Gas Transmission System cwilber@pngts.com
- Oliva G. Gorey, Mapping and Records, Maine Natural Gas ogg@maine.rr.com
- Troy F. Mcdonald, Right-of-Way Specialist, Verizon troy.f.mcdonald@verizon.com

1.1.1 Overview

Attendees represented a variety of Utilities who have significant assets in Maine. Most participants were actively engaged in day-to-day data management issues. All companies represent entities, even if owned by interests 'out-of-state,' who have long-time operations in Maine and long experience with most major policy and political issues governing their industries.

1.1.2 Business Functions

Primarily, all entities were concerned with asset-identification and with management of property along and within, corridors of land in Maine. Management of these 'Linear GIS' programs is punctuated by intense interest in structures or significant junctures important to the engineering of their systems. The common business functions among all participants were:

- Rights-of-Way Management;
- Tracking change in property ownership;
- Establishment/Identification of political boundaries;
- Acquisition and maintenance of linear orthophotos;
- Acquisition of point locations of significant features (pole locations, valves, point-of-service).

In addition to their internal business interests, all entities made note of their regulatory requirements; each had a negative comment on the recent PUC ruling (Docket Number 2001-284) requiring submission of documents in GIS formats. Entities either had responsibilities for Dig-Safe programs, 'High-Consequence Areas' (DEP initiative) or PUC Disaster-Preparedness Plans that require maps, charts and diagrams. Increasingly, GIS programs are used to manage these responsibilities. A few entities were starting to use their GIS capabilities in Work-Order Management Systems.

Another common theme was liability. All entities had experienced litigation regarding their operations and as such, were very careful with their GIS data. An extension of the liability theme was "defensibility". Most viewed the GIS system as a way to defend themselves against litigation.

Last, a common theme was the use of GIS in quantifying their assets for reasons of taxation. It is a common practice for each community to tax the utility based on a count of fixtures. Typically, the Utility has better information than the municipalities who levy the taxes.

1.1.3 Data

Typically, each entity creates their own data and does not rely or even use, as a practical matter, MeGIS datasets. The use of GPS was widespread. One common theme regarding data was a hope that the existing GPS base-stations remain open and supported.

When pressed by the MeGIS representative present at this focus group about the attitude toward sharing their highly-accurate datasets or their ROW information, the Utility representatives were uncomfortable. Cleary, they viewed their own datasets as proprietary.

There was some confusion about what the PUC was requiring of them and doubt about whether the PUC knew what it was asking for. They wondered whether an outcome of this State-wide GIS Needs Assessment might be an imposed data-sharing initiative.

Conversely, there was an expressed interest in having the state develop larger-scale data sets than the typical 1:24,000 (1"=2000') input-source scale data sets now offered on the MeGIS web site.

As an aside, one utility, the Maine Public Service Company in Presque Isle, has acted as a contractor to the state E911 program to GPS road centerlines in Aroostook County. The Maine Public Service Company with a service area of 3,600 square miles, tries to support GIS efforts in 'The County' and in fact, is seen by others concerned about GIS in the County as a technical asset.

This focus-group leader created a quick matrix of five datasets:

1. Pole Locations;
2. ROW;

3. Property Lines;
4. Valves; and,
5. Transmission and Distribution.

The focus group was asked to "vote" on their willingness to share data sets using a scale of 1-to-5. A vote of '1' indicated a willingness to share and '5' indicated an unwillingness to share. Interestingly, there was a great "unwillingness" to share as 20 out of a possible 30 ratings-of-willingness were 5. The others were mostly 'not applicable.' The conclusion, of course, is that the Utilities did not want to share any information that they were not already compelled to submit by law. Some of this sentiment was due to competitive reasons. For instance, the TeleCommunications representatives considered fiber counts proprietary. However, most of the caution seemed inherent in their business interests, their security interests and their distrust of data developed by anybody else. The one agency that seemed more amenable to sharing was the Maine Public Service Company.

1.1.4 Statewide GIS Initiative Needs

It was agreed that Metadata was not commonly understood or practiced. Further, there was some frustration with the quality of services delivered by the nascent GIS profession. Several of the participants argued for a State Agency to license 'GIS Professionals.' Evidently, there had been some bad experiences with the quality of GIS products delivered by contractors. Most of these issues seemed to revolve around data quality following close quality-control inspections by the utilities.

A persistent comment had to do with political boundaries. Although the MeGIS offers a 1:24,000 town boundary 'coverage' (metwp24) on its data catalog, most understood that this scale with its +/- 40 foot accuracy, may not be appropriate for their use. Additionally, when they are able to acquire and use individual parcel composites, there is considerable confusion about edgematching contiguous towns. There was some discussion of creating a large-scale municipal boundary coverages perhaps by locating known granite monumentation as a beginning.

In summary, these are the perceived state-wide needs:

- Better and more widespread use of Metadata;
- Licensing of GIS Professionals;
- Development of a large-scale political boundary layer;
- Consistency from State Agencies as to data required as part of required submissions;
- Ongoing State support for GPS base stations;
- Security issues as related to their infrastructure and the degree to which they are required to make this information public.

1.1.5 Stakeholder Roles

For all intents and purposes, the Utilities did not see themselves as stakeholders in a 'Statewide' GIS Initiative. Among these highly-regulated industries, there is a certain

tension that exists between the regulated and the regulator. The State and other federal agencies are of course, the regulators. Shared cooperation and shared development of a ‘statewide GIS initiative’ may be a naïve supposition at this juncture.

1.1.6 Major Benefits and Cost Justification

Certainly, these Utilities have found that the use of GIS is in their best interest. At this stage in their respective GIS efforts, it is surmised that their efforts are primarily defensive in nature. They either must defend themselves against excessive taxation by municipalities, defend themselves against litigation arising from property disputes, defend themselves against charges of bad faith in regulatory disagreements or sadly, defend their facilities against attack.

More proactive uses of GIS applications which increase efficiency or streamline operations or which increase field communications are just beginning. There did not appear, in fact, to be any robust enterprise-wide GIS applications among the Maine operations of these regional and national utilities.